

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



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Sexile to the Promised Land: Japanese Gay Migration to North America

Sociologist Manuel Guzmán has suggested the neologism “sexile” in order to indicate “(...) the exile of those who have had to leave their nations of origin on account of their sexual orientation”. While the concept mainly refers to queer people migrating from Latin America to North America, I ask whether sexile from Japan to North America does also exist. If this is the case, what would be the distinctiveness of the sexile of Japanese gay men? This presentation examines the motives of Japanese gay men to migrate and how they experience and interpret their moments in diaspora by focusing on their sexuality and attitude toward work, which is strongly connected with their gender/sexual identity and status of residence.

First, I will review the discourse of recent Japanese migration, which is not motivated by economic opportunity. By introducing a gender-based analysis, I propose to challenge the male/female dichotomy. The discursive analysis is based on two sources: (1) The analysis of nine semi-structured interviews I conducted in Tokyo in 2010 and 2011 with people in their late 20’s to 40’s who identify themselves as gay, and who have either studied or worked in the United States or Canada, (2) a close reading of two nonfiction works, namely the book *Aru nihonjin gei no kokuhaku* [Confessions of a Japanese gay man] by Makiko Iizuka in 1993 and the personal essay “Ējingu no bōken” [The adventure of aging] published in the out-of-print gay magazine *Niji* [Rainbow].

Kunisuke Hirano is a doctoral student of cultural anthropology at the University of Tokyo, where he also received his BA in Japanese literature and MA in cultural anthropology. He has also worked full-time at the Japan Center for Research Examination to make test questions for Japanese civil-servant examination in various fields. From September 2011, he will enroll at Boston University as a graduate student in anthropology/ Lecturer in Japanese.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for young scholars and Ph.D. candidates in the field of Social Sciences organized by Maren Godzik.

All are welcome to attend, but registration (godzik@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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